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Senate

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Righteous God, Your power is unsurpassed. Manifest Your might during this challenging season. Lord, show us Your strength.

Use our Senators for Your glory. Provide them with the wisdom to look ahead and to count the cost. Inspire them to desire, above all else, to remain within the circle of Your loving and prevailing providence. Lord, give them sufficient caution to see the danger coming and refuse to plunge ahead.

And, Lord, we thank You for the amazing service of Secretary Julie Adams.

We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now, the Senate is laser-focused on confirming President Biden's impressive Cabinet while paving the way for another round of urgent COVID relief. The two tasks will remain the top Senate priorities over the next several weeks.

By the end of this week, the Senate will have confirmed three Cabinet-level

officials—the U.N. Ambassador and the Secretaries of Agriculture and Energy—and will have set up confirmation votes early next week for the Secretaries of Education and Commerce and the Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers.

This week, Senate committees also held confirmation hearings on scores of other nominations, including the President's candidates for Attorney General, HHS Secretary, Interior Secretary, CIA Director, Surgeon General, and U.S. Trade Representative.

At the same time, Democrats are preparing to proceed with the urgently needed President Biden American Rescue Plan, a \$1.9 trillion lifeline that will lay the foundation for economic recovery and a return to life as normal.

We have come a long way in our fight against COVID, but we still have a long way to go. Over 60 million vaccinations have now been administered across the country. Death rates are finally, finally declining. But while the trends are headed in the right direction, more Americans are still dying per day than at any point during the worst weeks of last summer.

The same goes for our economy. While there are green shoots, our country remains 10 million jobs short of where we were last February—10 million jobs short. That is nothing to trifle with or pass over. Today's report on new jobless claims was the 49th week that the number was higher than at any point during the great recession.

Let me repeat that. Today's report on the number of Americans filing for unemployment benefits for the first time was the 49th week during the COVID pandemic that new unemployment claims were higher than at any point during the great recession. In the words of Fed Chairman Powell, hardly a big liberal, "The economic recovery remains uneven and far from complete, and the path ahead is highly uncertain."

That is from a very serious, staid man not prone to any hyperbole at all.

But what he is telling us is simple: We cannot take our foot off the gas. We cannot slow down before the race is won. We must proceed boldly and decisively.

Senate Democrats will move forward on the American Rescue Plan as soon as possible. The bill will erase any doubt that the American people, businesses, families, workers will have the resources that they need until we can defeat the virus and our economy comes roaring back. The American people should expect nothing less.

Just yesterday, over 150 executives from the Nation's business community said that taking action on the American Rescue Plan is the right thing to do. The business community is firmly lined up behind this plan. Earlier this month, 400 mayors from both parties, Democratic and Republican, sent a letter to Congress supporting the plan and the help it provides to keep teachers and firefighters and other essential public employees on the job.

In poll after poll, the American public overwhelmingly supports congressional action on a bold COVID relief package, a majority of Democrats and a majority of Republicans. As many as 7 in 10 Americans support the American Rescue Plan. There is a clear, bipartisan, nationwide mandate to act, and that is just what the Senate is going to do—a clear, bipartisan, nationwide mandate to act, and that is what we will do.

Now, from the start, we had hoped this effort would be bipartisan. As I said before, there is nothing about the budget process that precludes bipartisanship. The same process has been used no fewer than 17 times to produce major bipartisan legislation. But it seems that despite the historic nature of the crisis, despite the clear and pressing needs of the country, despite the support of mayors and Governors and economists and business leaders from across the political spectrum, and

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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S873